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THE CASTLE OF THE BODY

BY C. L. POWELL

It seems to be pretty well known that the allegorical conception of the body as a world, city, or castle, was a not unusual conceit in middle English times, but no one has as yet called attention to the various passages in which it occurs. These are interesting not only for themselves but on account of the use of the figure in later periods. That it may be found in continental literature as well as in English, is illustrated by its use by Doni in Italy¹ and DuBartas in France;² and that it became a favorite motif in England is shown by Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Fletcher's *Purple Island*, and Bunyan's *Holy War*. In the *Ancren Riwele* and the *Pricke of Conscience*, we find slight suggestions of the idea;³ but in the works considered below, the conceit is pursued in extended detail, and the passages resemble one another sufficiently to point towards a relationship among them. It is impossible in a short paper to discuss these poems at length; I shall

¹ See J. M. Berdan, *Doni and the Jacobeans*, *P.M.L.A.*, June, 1907.

² DuBartas, *Divine Weeks*, first week, sixth day. See p. 204, n. 15, below.

³ *Ancren Riwele*, ed. Morton, p. 48:

Wite wel þine heorte, uor soule lif is in hire; gif heo is well iwust.
Þe hēorte wardeins beoð þe vif wittes—sihðe & herunge, spekunges
and smellunge, & eueriches limes uelunge.

Pricke of Conscience, ed. Morris, l. 5820:

Ilka mans body may be cald,
Als a castelle here for to hald.

This conceit is of course similar to the Greek idea of microcosmos, but it did not come into English writing from the Greek. The *Ancren Riwele* passage takes its source from *Proverbs*, iv, 23, *Omni custodia serva cor tuum, quia ex ipso vita procedit*, and that of the *Pricke of Conscience* from St. Bernard's lines,

*Bonum castrum custodit
Qui corpus suum custodit,*

both of which passages are quoted in the respective texts. It may be worth noting that the two lines from the *Ancren Riwele* are almost identical with the corresponding ones in *Sawles Warde*. See p. 200, l. 35, below.

pause, therefore, at each one only long enough to point out what seem to me to be the most significant features.

The earliest of these is Robert Grosseteste's translation into Anglo-Norman of the French *Le Chateau d'Amour* in the first half of the thirteenth century. Here, the castle, which takes the place of the world in the microcosmic idea, is an allegorized representation of the body of the Virgin Mary and of certain properties pertaining thereto.⁴ The allegorical meaning of the castle and its various parts is, however, not at all apparent, and an interpretation without the help of the author would be impossible. The castle is described as being situated on a rock in the sea, painted in three colors,—the base green, the middle blue, and the top red—protected by four towers and seven barbaques, and watched over by three bailiffs. The writer explains his meaning as follows:⁵

That is the castelle of love and lysse, [p. 33]
Of solace, of socour, of joy and blysse,
Of hope, and hele, and sycornesse,
And fulle of alle swetnesse.
This is the maydons body so fre
That never noon bote hoe,
That with so fele thewes warned was
As that swete Marye was.

The fondement that to the roche fast lyth, [p. 34]
And the fayre grenship therwyth,
That is the madonis beleve so ryght,
That hath alle here body i-lyght.

The middle part is "swetnesse and feyreship"; the top is "clere love and bryght."

The foure smale toures abowten,
That kepyn the hie toure withowtyn, [p. 34]
Foure hed thewes abowten heere me syth,
Four vertues cardynals thei byth,

⁴ The conception in this poem of the human soul being wooed by a heavenly bridegroom, connects it with other poems of the period, such as *Hali Meidenhad*, the *Ancren Riwle*, and the *Wohing of ure Laverde*. The soul is represented as the daughter of God in the *Pricke of Conscience*, l. 5797.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, ed. Halliwell, 1849, p. 29 ff. Our version of this poem is taken from a fourteenth century ms. It may be disputed as to whether or not the original translation antedated the writing of *Sawles Warde*, but the point is not worth discussing here.

That is strenghe and slyzhship,
 Ryghtwesnes and warship;
 Everychon hath a ȝate myȝ gynne
 That non evylle ther may com withinne.

Bote the innemaste bayli I wot, [p. 35]
 That betokenyth heere holy maydenhod.

The myddyll bayly that wyte ȝe
 Betokeneth here holy chastité,
 And sethen the otmast bayle
 Betokenyth here hoole spousayle.

And the sevyn barbacanes abowte, [p. 36]
 That with so gret gynne byth wrowght withowte,
 And kepyn these castel so welle,
 With aroo and with quarell
 That byth sevyn vertuce that han wyth wyne
 Overcome the vij. dedly synne.

Thereas the castell is so stabull, [p. 39]
 Cherité is there constabull.

The important details here are the "maydons body so fre" and the virtues attached to it, the spiritual and semi-religious interpretation, and certain details, such as the four cardinal virtues, the three bailiffs, and the constable Charity. It will be noticed that no parts of the body are given allegorical significance, and similarly the details of the castle have no physical counterparts; in other words, the allegory is almost entirely unintelligible.

The next example of this castle conceit is found in the old homily *Sawles Warde*, which was written, it is thought, somewhere in the first half of the thirteenth century. The description of the castle is as follows:⁶

Dis hus þe ure lauerd	[l. 13]	wið alle unwreste þeawes.
spekeð of is seolf þe mon.		azein euch god þeaw,
inwið þe monnes wit		þe willeð i þis hus
is þe huselauerd;		Godes deore chatel
ant te fulitohe wif,		under Wittes wissunge,

⁶ *Op. cit.*, ed. Wagner (Bonn, 1908), l. 13 ff. Morris also edits this poem (*E.E.T.S.*), using the Bodl. ms. (the oldest) and the Royal ms. In his version, the work appears as prose. Wagner, "*auf grund aller Handschriften*," casts it into the above poetical form. The latter treatment seems the more authoritative.

mei beo Wil ihaten.

3ef Wit ne forbude ham; [l. 27]

for alle ha beoð untohene

ant rechelese hinen,

buten 3ef he ham rihte.

ant [hwuche] beoð þeos hinen?

Summe beoð wið-ute

ant summe wið-innen.

þeos wið-ute [ha] beoð

þe monnes fif wittes:

sihðe *ant* herunge,

smechunge *ant* smellunge

ant euch limes felunge.

þeos beoð hinen under Wit

as under huse-lauerd.

ant hwer so he is 3emeles,

nis hare nan, þet ne fareð

ofte untohelice

ant gulteð ilome

oðer i fol semblant

oðer in uuel dede.

In-wið beoð [his] hinen

in so moni mislich þonc

to cwemen wel þe husewif.

Ne hið neuwer his hus [l. 59]

for þeos hinen wel i-wist

for hwon þet he slepe

oðer fare from hame,

þet is, hwen mon forȝet his wit

ant let ham i-wurðen

ah ne behoueð hit nowt

þet tis hus beo irobbet:

for þer is inne þe tresur

þet is monnes sawle.

forto breoken þis hus

etter þis treosor,

þet Godd bohte mit [h]is deð

ant lette lif on rode,

is moni þeof abuten

ba bi dei ant bi niht,

unseheliche gastes .

þet is huselauerd,

is eauer hire unþeaw

forto sechen inȝong

abute þe wahes,

to amurðren hire þrinne.

þet heauet þerof is þe feont,

þe meistreð ham alle.

azeines him ant his keis

þe husebonde, þet is Wit,

warneð his hus þus:

ure lauerd haueð ilenet him

fowre of his dehtren,

þet beoð to understonden

þe fowr heauet-þeawes.

þe eareste is Warschipe

icleopet, an te oðer

is gastelich Strencðe,

ant te þridde is Með

Rihtwisnesse þe feorðe.

Wit, te husebonde,

Godes cunestable

cleopeð Warschipe forð

ant makeð hire dureward.

Strencðe stont nest hire. [l. 112]

þe þridde suster, þet is Með [l. 118]

hire he makeð meister

ouer his willesfule hird,

þet we ear of speken,

þet ha leare ham meðe,

þet me meosure hat:

þe middel of twa þing,

for þet is þeaw in euch stude

and tuht forto halden;

þe feorðe suster Rihtwisnesse,

[l. 131]

sit on hest as deme.

In these passages we find, besides the same general conception, some definite similarities to the *Castle of Love*. The most apparent of these are the same four cardinal virtues as guardians (except

that Worship is replaced by Temperance), and the Constable, the one being Charity and the other Wit or Intelligence. So far as the allegorical value of the two poems is concerned, we may say that the former makes more of the physical features and the latter of the living or spiritual, and that the allegorical signification is as clear in the one case as it is obscure in the other. Furthermore, in *Sawles Warde* the castle is differentiated from its chief guardian and lacks the personality of the Virgin castle, that personality being distributed among the caretakers, and the house itself being represented as both inanimate and sexless. This allows for more play throughout the entire metaphor and consequently more significance in its interpretation. Thus we have in the latter case not only a contention against the evil forces without but also internal strife between Wit and Will. In addition we have the introduction of the five wits and the omission of the less tangible seven virtues, although these are suggested in the various defenders of the castle from the attacks of the vices. The most important of these new details are man's soul, represented by the treasure, Wit and Will, together with the strife between them, and the external enemies to the castle, headed by the devil. The use of the five wits in other works prevents us from attaching much importance to their introduction here.

In the *Vita de Dowel, Dobet and Dobest*, the second part of *Piers the Plowman*, the same castle allegory occurs again. The references to the figure are too scattered to allow a quotation of sufficient length to show them all; I shall therefore give only that one which contains the actual description.⁷

"Sire Dowel dwelleth," quoth Wit, "not a day hennes, [l. 1]
 In a castel of Kuynde i-mad of foure kunne thinges,
 Of erthe, of eir hit is mad i-medelet to-gedere,
 With wynd and watur ful wittiliche i-meint.
 Cuynde hath closet ther-in craftiliche with-alle,
 A loueli lemmon lyk to him-self,
 Anima heo hette: to hire hath envye
 A proud prikere of Fraunce, *princeps huius mundi*,
 And wolde wynnen hire a-wei with wiles ȝif he mihte.

But the cunstable of the castel that kepeth hem alle, [l. 16]

⁷ *Op. cit.*, ed. Skeat, A text, Pas. x, l. 1 ff. The three texts vary somewhat, but the differences are not worth noting here.

Is a wys kniht with-alle sire Inwit he hette,
 And hath fyue feire sones bi his furste wyf;
 Sire Seowel, and Seywel and Herewel the hende,
 Sire Worche-wel-with-thin-hond a wiht mon of strengthe.
 And sire Godfrey Gowel grete lordes alle.

That is the castel that Kuynde made *Caro* hit hette [l. 38]
 And is as muche as to mene as mon with a soule.

Inwit and alle wittes ben closest ther-inne, [l. 42]
 For loue of that ladi that *Lyf* is i-nempnet;
 That is *Anima*, that ouer al in the bodi wandureth,
 But in the herte is hire hom hizest of alle;
 Heo is lyf and ledere and a lemmon of heuene *
 Inwit is the help that *Anima* desyreth;
 After the grace of god the gretteste is Inwit.
 Inwit in the hed is and helpeth the soule,
 Fot thorw his connyng he kepeth *Caro et Anima*
 In rule and in reson bote recheles hit make.

In monnes brayn he is most and mihtiest to knowe, [l. 54]
 There he is breamest but gif blod hit make.
 For whonne blod is bremore then brayn then is Inwit i-bounde,
 And eke wantoun and wylde withouten eny resoun.

Thenne hath the pouke pouer sire *princeps huius mundi*, [l. 62]
 Ouer suche maner men miht in heore soules."

The similarity of the allegory here to that of *Sawles Warde* lies not only in the main idea but in not a few of the details as well. The chief of these are: the various inhabitants of the two houses, particularly Wit and Inwit; the opponents without, led in each case by the devil; the governing power of the house, invested in Intelligence,⁹ and the distress of the body, or home, when this power is absent; and the soul, in *Sawles Warde* represented as a treasure and in the *Vita* personified into the form of a woman, which is made the greatest object of value to be guarded from hostile forces. The figures Wit and Will are removed from the castle in the *Vita*,¹⁰ but both occur nearby in the poem, as if in some

* Note the conception of the soul as a woman and a "lemmon of heuene." Cf. p. 198, n. 4, above and p. 203, n. 12, below.

⁹ In the *Vita*, Inwit has not only intelligence but also temperance, which in *Sawles Warde*, is attributed to Wit's daughter Meß.

¹⁰ Counterparts to them exist, however, in Inwit and Caro, between whom a disagreement is suggested, although not so violent a one as that between Wit and Will.

way connected with the general idea, and an antithesis is implied as existing between them.¹¹ Dowel, the owner of the castle, is not altogether a new figure, as he may be likened to, if not identified with, "ure lauerd" of *Sawles Warde*. He is rather an indistinct personage, seeming to represent human perfection, although on some occasions he appears to represent Christ.¹² The fact that Dobet and Dobest are his daughters assisting Anima, just as Worship, Strength, Temperance, and Righteousness are the daughters of "ure lauerd," contributes to make the two appear identical. The five wits, or approximations to them, are also present in each poem, but as before noted, no great significance can be attached to the fact. There is in both poems the same lack of parallel between the features of the body and the physical attributes of the castles. Certain expressions in the *Vita* seem to echo those of the earlier poem, but they are not numerous enough or sufficiently similar to enable us to argue anything from them.¹³

The castle in *The Faerie Queene* is described in far greater detail than any of those preceding it. I quote only the two stanzas which explain the allegory:¹⁴

Of all Gods workes, which do this world adorne,
There is no one more faire and excellent,
Then is mans body both for powre and forme,
Whiles it is kept in sober gouernment;
But none then it more fowle and indecent,
Distempred through misrule and passions bace;
It growes a Monster, and incontinent

¹¹ A, ix, 118 (B, viii, 124; C, xi, 124):

Oure Wille wolde i-witen 3if Wit couthe hym techen;

also C, xi, 51:

Ac fre wil and fre wit folweth a man euere.

In the first passage, Wille is probably merely the author himself, as in C, ix, 5; but considering both passages, it seems as if some contrast between the two ideas was meant to be conveyed.

¹² A, viii, 186 (B, vii, 199; C, x, 350); also A, ix, 40 (B, viii, 45; C, xi, 43). The character of Dowel seems to indicate that the writer had in mind the "wooing of our Lord" situation.

¹³ The comparison of man's body to a boat (A, ix, 25; B, viii, 30; C, xi, 33), battered by the waves of the sea and having Charity as "champion," is extremely suggestive of Grosseteste's castle of the sea.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, Bk. III, canto ix, verse 1; and II, xi, 2. The whole of the ninth canto is employed in the description of the castle.

Doth loose his dignitie and natie grace.
Behold, who list, both one and other in this place.

But in a body, which doth freely yeeld
His partes to reasons rule obedient,
And letteth her that ought the scepter weeld,
All happy peace and goodly gouernment,
Is setled there in sure establishment;
There Alma like a virgin Queen most bright,
Doth flourish in all beautie excellent:
And to her guesstes doth bounteous banket dight,
Attempted goodly well for health and for delight.

Spenser's allegory differs from the preceding ones chiefly in the parallelism established in physical aspects, in which the parts of the body are worked into the form of a castle with great detail. It seems pretty clear that he took this part of the conceit from DuBartas.¹⁵ There is, however, nothing in DuBartas suggestive of the spiritual, or non-physical, part of the allegory; and if Spenser is indebted to any previous work for this, it must be to one or more of those discussed above.

It will be readily seen from the passage of Spenser here referred to that the general situation is again the same,—a fleshly castle in which the chief dweller is the soul (Anima or Alma), who is opposed by hostile forces from without and defended by members of the household. The castle is ruled by reason and bulwarked against the enemy by the five senses. In the Spenser version, it is further defended by the Knight of Temperance, corresponding in part to Wit and Inwit of the earlier poems, who fulfills his allegorical character by beating off the horde of evil spirits. On the whole, less is made of the spiritual significance in Spenser's poem than in the *Vita*; and the moral idea as expressed in the stanzas quoted, though strangely similar to that of both *Sawles Warde* and the *Vita*, is not allegorically portrayed, as it is in both the other works. The minor details which seem to point to a dependence by Spenser upon the preceding poems, are: the two damsels attending Alma, who may (or may not) be taken from Dobet and Dobest; the chamber of Alma, being the heart or parlor; and the

¹⁵ See the discussion of the relation of Spenser to DuBartas, with parallel extracts, in A. H. Upham, *The French Influence in English Literature*, pp. 168 ff., and App. B.

location of the governing power in the head. The conception of Alma herself, who, like Anima, "ouer al in the bodi wandureth," is, of course, the chief point of similarity between the *Vita* and the *Faerie Queene* versions, aside from the general idea.

A more careful study of these four parallel passages than the above brief discussion may indicate, leads me to think that it is not possible to *prove* the dependence of any one of them upon a predecessor, although such dependence is strikingly suggested, especially in the similarity of the *Vita* passage to that in *Sawles Warde*. My aim in this paper has been merely to bring to notice the existence of this parallelism, in the hope that someone else may find herein a profitable point of departure for wider study.

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